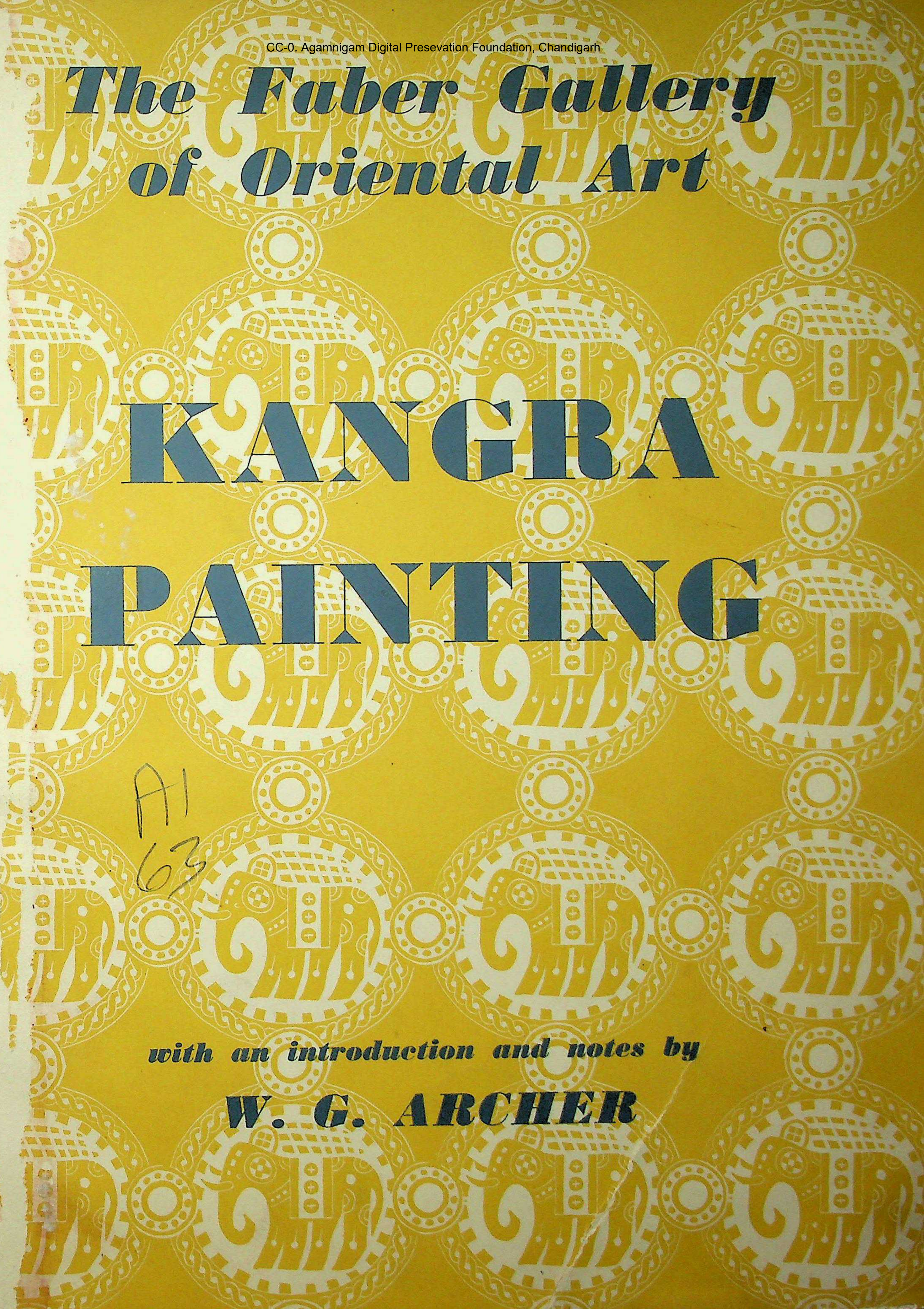

The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art

KANGRA PAINTING

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with an introduction and notes by

W. G. ARCHER

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Introduction by W. G. Archer

During the closing years of the eighteenth century, the Punjab Hill State of Kangra became the centre of one of the greatest styles of Indian painting. A blend of Mughal accomplishment and Hindu aspirations, this painting was not directly affected by Western influence, yet in certain important ways it possesses a striking resemblance to certain kinds of Western art. Its flowing rhythmical line, its simple unaffected naturalism, its predilection for lovely feminine forms, above all, its air of innocent sexuality—all these qualities have an obvious parallel in the art of Botticelli. At the same time, its merging of religion and romance—the one imbuing the other with natural exaltation—invites comparison with the poetry of Blake. But it is rather with the work of an important modern artist, the Belgian Paul Delvaux, that Kangra painting has its closest Western analogy. In Delvaux's work, the recurring subject is a romantic situation—the lonely passionate woman longing for a lover. There is no direct allusion to her agony but its constant underlying presence is revealed by means of sexual symbols. The lover is represented by a sculptured rider rearing in the moonlight, a candle flickering in the darkness, a pillar rising to the sky while the woman's passionate requirements are expressed through the imagery of trees, flowers and mirrors and the frank depiction of her nude magnificent charms.[1] To this kind of visual poetry Kangra painting is exactly equivalent. Its characteristic theme is romantic love. Woman, lovely in herself, but restless with longing, is its constant subject while the whole function of incidental objects is 'to match the state of hearts'. Clouds, rain, trees, pitchers, flowers and turrets are all introduced as poetic symbols designed to indicate the final crisis.

The sudden appearance of this art in Kangra has an air of intriguing mystery for, until its emergence in about the year 1780, the State appears to have had no developed school of painting. From 1751 to 1774, its ruler, Raja Ghamand Chand, had achieved fresh heights of feudal glory. He seems, however, to have been entirely indifferent to art. Only four portraits of him are known to exist and these are all in a style which is only a rough version of a more northerly school of painting as propagated by the Sikhs.[2] Between their clumsy crudities and the delicate refinements of Kangra painting proper, there is such a gulf that wherever these particular portraits may have been painted, they provide no clue to later developments. Yet in spite of this dead blank, a great style arose and there are two factors which seem to have played a crucially important role. The first was the accession to the Kangra throne in 1775 of a quite exceptional patron. The second was the existence in a nearby State of master-artists suitable for employment. Neither of these circumstances, had they occurred in isolation, could have produced a major art. It was their accidental combination which led to the special situation out of which the Kangra style arose. Yet besides these important circumstances, one other factor must also be taken into account. There is a sense in which Kangra painting could only have arisen in the Punjab Hills. Its special cult of innocent womanhood was the product of Rajput traditions as they had developed in isolation. In Rajputana, Mughal influence had been all-pervasive and while a number of indigenous styles had come to brusque maturity, they were generally wanting in precisely that quality which most distinguishes Kangra painting—the quality of elegant idealism. We can only explain this difference by realizing that in the Punjab Hills, Rajput culture had enjoyed a greater freedom and that, as a consequence, its painting expressed with more directness the basic sentiments of the courts. It was because both patron and artists were imbued with these emotional attitudes that Kangra painting was able to achieve its exquisite heights.

The artists whose presence was such a vital prerequisite for Kangra art were all associated with the petty State of Guler. This had originally been founded as an offshoot of Kangra and, lying lower down the Kangra valley, it had, therefore, been more accessible from the Punjab plains. It was not, however, until about the year 1720 and then only as a result of infiltration from the little State of Basohli that any local style of painting seems to have been developed. Some years earlier, under Raja Kirpal Pal (c. 1678–93), Basohli had owned the most flourishing school of painting in the Punjab Hills. Marked by 'savage intensity', the style was notable for its burning angry colours, its violent distortions and for a certain suave barbaric grace. About 1700, however, a gradual dispersal of Basohli artists had begun and, as a result, not only were such northern States as Jammu, Bandhralta and Chamba affected but what is more significant for our purpose, the more southerly one of Guler.

The first evidence of cultural fertilization at Guler occurs in the reign of Raja Dalip Singh (1695–c. 1730) when a style of painting closely resembling that of Basohli makes its appearance. Flat red planes are used for backgrounds while certain idioms for trees, architecture and people have robust Basohli characters. It was under Raja Gobardhan Singh (c. 1730–73), however, that decisive experiments were made. In about the year 1740, a Mughal artist from the Plains seems to have joined the court. His style was markedly different from the dreary sobrieties which had characterized Mughal painting under the emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707). In fact, its nearest equivalent is the fluent naturalism of the later Akbar period. His methods were closely similar to those of another artist, Nainsukh,[3] who, a few years later, was painting for a

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[1] For reproductions of work by Paul Delvaux, see René Gaffé, *Paul Delvaux* (Brussels, 1945), Paul Fierens 'Paul Delvaux', *Cahiers d'Art*, Vol. XX, 1945–6, pp. 247–252, Claude Spaak, *Paul Delvaux* (Brussels, 1948), and Émile Langui, *Paul Delvaux* (Venice, 1949).

[2] W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills* (London, 1952), pp. 65 and 86.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 46–52, 90, 91.

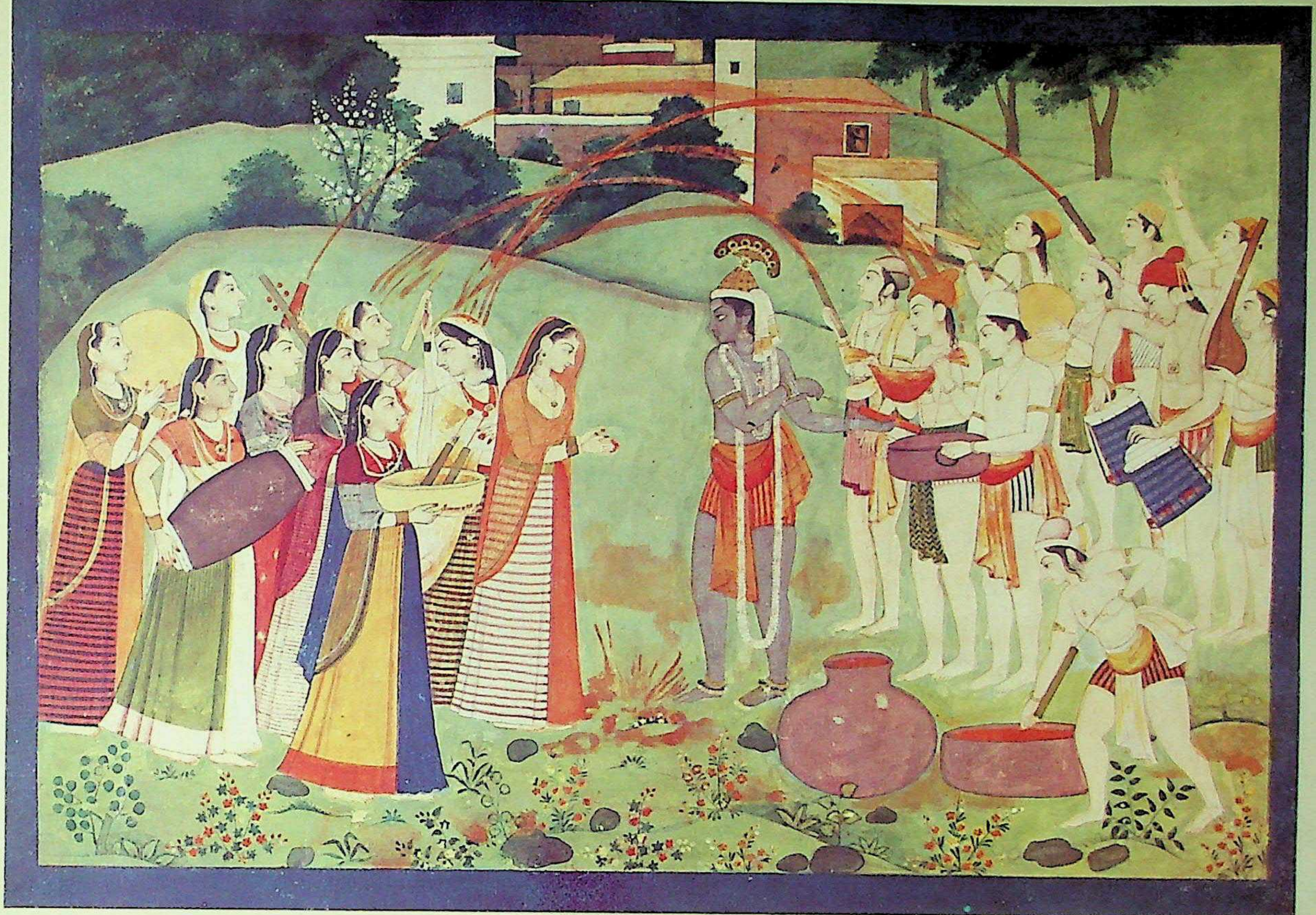

Plate 1. The Festival of Spring. (See page 24)

scion of the house of Jammu, Raja Balwant Singh. So close, in fact, are the two styles that it is more than likely that either Nainsukh himself also worked at Guler, producing the pictures in question, or members of his family, skilled in his own technique, were given employment. As a result, from 1740 to 1770, two strands of expression occur in Guler, each strand affecting the other yet each remaining perceptibly distinct. The strand illustrated by the Mughal 'outsider' accounts for various pictures of the Raja and his court, as also for certain studies on religious themes. All these show a keen interest in pose and gesture, individuals are portrayed with marked facial character and the line is, in general, so suave and fluid that the whole composition exudes a vivid naturalism. The other strand, deriving from the early contact with Basohli, accounts for pictures in which the backgrounds are still, to a great extent, schematic. Flat red planes are employed, a standard combination of red, blue and white persists while abrupt angular settings provide sharp contrast to the suavely rendered figures. Side by side with such technical developments, there also emerges a 'deliberate research into physical charm'. In both kinds of Guler art, ladies were now portrayed with a conscious delight in their fluid movements and rhythmical grace, sexual symbols were freely exploited and pictures were increasingly produced illustrating with exquisite refinement the poetry of passion. When, in 1773, Raja Gobardhan Singh at length died, Guler artists were still experimenting with different physical types, no single authoritative manner had been evolved and there was still a difference between the rival strands of art. Many works of charming nobility, however, had been produced, a new vocabulary of artistic expression had been devised and the stage was set for a new superb flowering.[1]

It is at this point that a Kangra ruler impinges on the scene. Raja Sansar Chand (1775–1823) was only ten years old when he succeeded his grandfather, Raja Ghamand Chand.[2] He was so impressed by the latter's masterful spirit, however, that from 1786 his supremacy over other States became unchallenged, much tribute was ruthlessly exacted and his court at Kangra achieved the acme of feudal splendour. Such successes might easily have satisfied the young ruler and if he had followed the example of Ghamand Chand, he might well have remained serenely indifferent to every form of art. He appears, however, to have been that quite exceptional phenomenon, a Rajput ruler who was not only interested in feudal glory but fascinated and entranced by art. At a very early stage, his interest was caught by pictures for, when only 12 or 13, we find him depicted examining the work of several painters and discussing their studies with them.[1] Such interest was to characterize him all his life and even as late as 1820, the English traveller Moorcroft,[2] noted that many artists were still in his employment and went out of his way to stress 'the Raja's fondness for drawing' and his 'large collection of pictures'.

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[1] For a fuller discussion of the Guler school and the evidence for its reconstruction, see *ibid*. pp. 17–44, Figs. 11–34.

[2] Sansar Chand's father, Raja Tegh Chand (1774–5) can, for practical purposes, be ignored.

A delight in painting, however, would have been of little significance had not Sansar Chand been keenly alive to certain other cultural movements of his time. 'Raja Sansar Chand' Moorcroft records 'spends the early part of the day in the ceremonies of his religion. The evening is devoted to singing and naching[3] in which the performers recite most commonly Brij Bhakha songs relating to Krishna.' The cult of Krishna seems, in fact, to have had a special fascination for him and we can perhaps connect its appeal with the general nature of Sansar Chand's own life. In the Rajput society into which he was born, ladies were kept in careful seclusion, chastity was prized and the only licit channels for sexual expression were the negotiated bride or the arranged concubine. Romance, in the usual sense of the term, was impossible—it might almost be termed an aberration—and just as in medieval France, the same repressed conditions produced an imaginative release in troubadour poetry, in Rajput society there was a corresponding outlet in the cult and poetry of Krishna.

This cult had its importance from its lack of all connection with ordinary life. Krishna's career among the cowherds of Brindaban was the negation of Rajput propriety while his exploration of romance was the exact reverse of the conduct which would normally have befitted a Rajput and a gentleman. Above all, his passion for Radha, a married woman, glorified the greatest lapse from Rajput morals, adultery. Yet because this conduct was susceptible of religious interpretation[4]—Radha being accepted as a symbol of the soul—the story evoked enthusiastic responses and some of the deepest Rajput wishes obtained imaginative relief. To Sansar Chand, the cult was evidently of quite exceptional significance and it is possible that as in the case of many other patrons, his flair for art was in some mysterious way connected with his attitude to sex. Certainly his delight in the cult of Krishna seems not unrelated to his own romances, for a village song of the Kangra valley speaks of his attachment to a shepherd girl.

> The Gaddi was grazing his goats
> His daughter was grazing the cows
> Seeing her young face
> The Raja loved her.[5]

His sensibility seems, in fact, to have expressed itself not only in art and poetry but in a certain sexual romanticism and while in Rajput society the cult of Krishna must frequently have been a 'substitute gratification', for Sansar Chand it may also have served as a validating sanction, perhaps even as a complement, to his private experiences.

It is these two qualities—a flair for painting and a zest for Krishna—which characterized Sansar Chand when he succeeded to the Kangra court. We do not know what actual steps he took to attract master-painters but the death of Raja Gobardhan Singh of Guler in 1773, with, by implication, the sudden removal of a great patron, is perhaps the clue to subsequent events. It is certainly significant that in about the year 1770, at least one Guler artist seems to have migrated to the northerly State of Punch while about the year 1775 other Guler artists appear to have reached Tehri Garhwal, there to produce a style of art whose romantic charm is only equalled by that of Kangra itself. Following the death of Gobardhan Singh, then, we must assume a period of anxious crisis, the partial exploration of other centres and finally, a drift to Kangra. In such circumstances, the knowledge that the youthful Sansar Chand was keenly interested in painting may well have been decisive and by 1780, a number of Guler artists must almost certainly have sought his favour.

The particular painters who now produced the Kangra style are still comparatively unknown. The names of two—Fattu and Kushan Lal—have been preserved and it is possible, as Mr Karl Khandalavala has suggested, that Kushan Lal is identical with Kushala, the nephew of Nainsukh. No signed examples of their work, however, have survived and we can only conjecture what were their respective roles. It is clear, however, from the pictures associated with the first great period of Kangra art, 1780 to 1806, that at least two master-artists representing the 'Mughal' strand in Guler painting were working at Kangra while a number of other practitioners deriving from the other less sophisticated streams were also employed. One of these master-artists is associated with a set of pictures illustrating the *Bhagavata Purana* (pl. 4). The Mughal flair for character study is present and as in previous Guler pictures, there is the same all-pervading air of innocent naturalism while landscape backgrounds have the same open spaces and simple construction. It is rather in the use of an intensely fluid line that the artist of the *Bhagavata Purana* detaches himself from former Guler art. He reaches, indeed, a new level of rhythmical exaltation while the use of shaded outlines gives each of his compositions a luminous clarity which was nowhere else achieved in Kangra art.

The second master-artist is discernible in pictures such as Plates 1 and 2 and in a series of illustrations to Bihari's Krishna cycle, the *Sat Sai*.[6] In these paintings, the outline is no longer so decisively shaded and while the landscapes have a warm luxuriance, contrasting with the sparse schematic backgrounds of Guler art, there is a greater standardization in the treatment of the figures. These still possess a suavely modelled grace but detailed characterization is wanting. At the same time, birds, rivers, plants and flowering trees are all employed as symbolic parallels to enhance the charms of lovers and suggest the nature of their meetings. We reach, in fact, a type of art in which, as Coomaraswamy has pointed out, 'the complete avoidance of sentimentality is founded on the constant reference to the physical fact.'[1]

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[1] Reproduced J. C. French, 'Sansar Chand of Kangra', *Indian Art and Letters*, Vol. XXI, (1947), pp. 89–91.

[2] William Moorcroft, a Veterinary Surgeon of the East India Company. His *Travels in the Himalaya Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab* (London, 1837) contains a vivid account of Sansar Chand as he was in 1820.

[3] 'Entertainments, by professional dancers or nautch girls.'

[4] For an admirably lucid exposition of the cult of Krishna and its deep religious significance, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting* (Oxford, 1916) Vol. I, pp. 26–41.

[5] J. C. French, *Himalayan Art* (London, 1931), p. 38.

[6] N. C. Mehta, *Studies in Indian Painting* (Bombay, 1926), Pls. 22, 25 and 26. Bihari Lal, a Hindi poet of the mid-17th century, composed 700 (Sat sai) poems, notable for their wit and epigrammatic brilliance.

The style of both these artists is clearly that of Kangra and the same is true of many other practitioners who also received patronage. Here also the change of court appears to have had deep and fructifying consequences. In 1770, at Guler, there had been at least three different formulae for recording the female face. Two of these were now discarded and it was the third only which was taken up and standardized. A change was also made in the favourite posture for depicting women. In Guler, the standing or the seated pose had chiefly claimed attention. At Kangra, it was the peculiar gliding grace of a girl in motion—the head bent, the dress filling out, the whole resumed in a single curving line, which became the Kangra type *par excellence*. At the same time, the early Guler method of using colour symbolically and of introducing formalized shapes was given an air of greater naturalism. Geometry was still employed as a foil to feminine grace but instead of distorting shapes in an angular direction, the same effect was achieved by means of architecture—buildings with their hard and rigid lines serving by their very angularity to enhance the body's softness. Finally, symbolic settings embodying the same images which were current in poetry were adopted as the normal means for conveying romantic emotions.

For all this painting, the adhesion by Raja Sansar Chand to the cult of Krishna provides the main motivating force. Indeed without this cult and the ruler's devotion to it, the concentration of these artists on the feminine form and their constant investment of it with delicate poetry would be unintelligible. It was because Krishna, the divine lover, had constantly to be depicted that romantic themes engrossed their minds. And since Krishna himself delighted in romance, the lovely objects of his passion gradually assumed dominance until it is the feminine character, endowed with loving tenderness, innocent sensuality and intensely passionate needs, the feminine form serenely graceful with gentle languid curves, which becomes the true subject of Kangra art.

For twenty-five years, the court of Sansar Chand provided the painters with ideal conditions. In 1806, however, a crisis occurred. Advancing from Nepal, the Gurkhas invaded Kangra, routed the State armies and besieged Sansar Chand in the vast fortress which for several centuries had been renowned as sentinel of the hills. The siege ensued for three years during which the enemy devastated the countryside, despoiled the villages and compelled Sansar Chand to lead a hunted existence. In 1809, seeing no other remedy, he invoked the aid of Ranjit Singh and with the help of Sikh armies successfully raised the siege. His feudal supremacy, however, was ended. The Kangra fort passed to a Sikh garrison and Sansar Chand himself was forced to admit Ranjit Singh's sovereignty, to present himself once a year at Lahore, and for the rest, to live quietly at his country seats. It was at one of these, existing on a paltry 70,000 rupees a year yet spending 'large sums of money upon a numerous zenana and a parcel of hungry retainers' that he died in 1823.

Such a violent upheaval inevitably affected Kangra painting. We know that at least one artist, Sajnu, must have left the court, for in 1810 he presented the ruler of the neighbouring State of Mandi, Raja Iswari Sen, with a set of pictures illustrating the Rajput ballad, the *Hamir-Hath*.[2] The abrupt curtailment of courtly luxuries must also have affected artistic production. Yet painting can hardly have ceased altogether and it is to other factors that we must look to explain the change of style which now appears to have set in. A first factor is the age of Sansar Chand himself. In 1806, he was 41 years old and while this would not in itself have precluded active patronage, we must remember that the great development of the style had been the creation of his early manhood. It is possible that his first enthusiasms had by now become blunted, other preoccupations were disturbing his mind, and though he retained a lively interest in painting, there was no longer the same electrifying passion. In such circumstances, his artists may possibly have become complacent and as a consequence, their work may have lost its fervid touch. It is a second factor, however, which possibly provides a more correct answer. If the Gurkha invasions did not cause, they may well have synchronized with the death of the Kangra master-painters. We have seen that at least two of these must almost certainly have joined the Kangra court in about the year 1780. Both were probably in advanced middle age and it is therefore more than likely that after serving at Kangra for ten to twenty years, their careers were ended by death. It is certainly the quality of fluent animation which seems to disappear after 1806—the quality which represents the working out of the Mughal vein in Guler art and is the vital factor in Kangra painting during its greatest period. Without this vitalizing influence, Kangra artists might continue their exquisite creations but the force responsible for the early supple strength, the powerful colour and the rhythmical verve was missing.

The subsequent phases of Kangra painting can be shortly narrated. With the death of Sansar Chand in 1823, the school not only lost its greatest stimulus but much of its stability. Six years after his death, his successor, Anirodh Chand retreated to Tehri Garhwal rather than marry his sisters to two Sikhs. Before doing so, the traveller Vigne tells us, he 'despatched all his valuables across the Sutlej' and although pictures are not expressly mentioned, it is reasonable to suppose that they were included in the royal baggage and that they comprised the greater part of the family collection. Shortly afterwards, the two princesses were married to the Raja of Garhwal, Sudarshan Shah (1815–59) and since a number of the finest Kangra pictures are preserved in Tehri, it seems certain,

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[1] Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[2] For details of this set, see Hirananda Sastri, 'The Hamir Hath', *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, Vol. XVI, 1917, pp. 35–41.

[*continued on page 24*

Plate 2

RADHA AND KRISHNA IN THE GROVE

Kangra, *c.* 1785

Size: $6\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$ in

Victoria and Albert Museum (P. C. Manuk and Miss G. M. Coles bequest, I.S. 15–1949)

With Plate 1, an example of the delicate poetic style which from Guler antecedents came to maturity at Kangra early in the reign of Raja Sansar Chand. The images which serve as a symbolic background are, in each case, taken from Hindi and Sanskrit poetry. Particularly common symbols for physical enchantment were the lotus plants which appear, nodding and swaying in the stream. If a poet wished to praise a lady's hands and feet, he said they were 'soft as lotuses' or if his concern was with her features, he wrote 'Your face is lovely as a lotus flower'. A shapely arm was 'graceful as a lotus stalk', while lovers sitting by a stream immediately called to mind the same exquisite plant with its delicate leaves and matchless blossom.

'My love and I sit together
Like lotus and its leaves.'[1]

Besides the lotus, flowering trees were also regarded as symbolic—their spear-shaped branches, laden with flowers, being treated as poetic parallels for upsurging love. The waxen stems of plantains were other images which brought to mind the absent lover[2] while their large cool leaves were often used in poetry as romantic symbols for a girl's smooth thighs. Even more common as an image for embracing lovers was the creeper entwined about a trunk while streams with tossing waves vividly evoked the force and flow of passion.

In the picture, all these images are fused in one—form, line and colour all serving to express and emphasize the associations of poetry. The girl's hair is treated with the same twining lines as is the water in the stream, the edge of her dress with the same scalloped curves which appear in the leaves of the lotuses. The curving outlines of her thigh are paralleled by the oval plantain leaves, while the thick creeper coiling round the tree echoes the blending postures of the two lovers. It is in ways such as these that Kangra artists accomplished the supremely difficult task of translating poetry into painting, creating in the process a type of art which, if literary in origin, transcends literature in its ultimate achievement.

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[1] Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, *Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills* (O.U.P., Bombay, 1944), p. 160.

[2] Compare a Guler picture, *The Lady with the Plantain*, reproduced at Figure 31, *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills.*

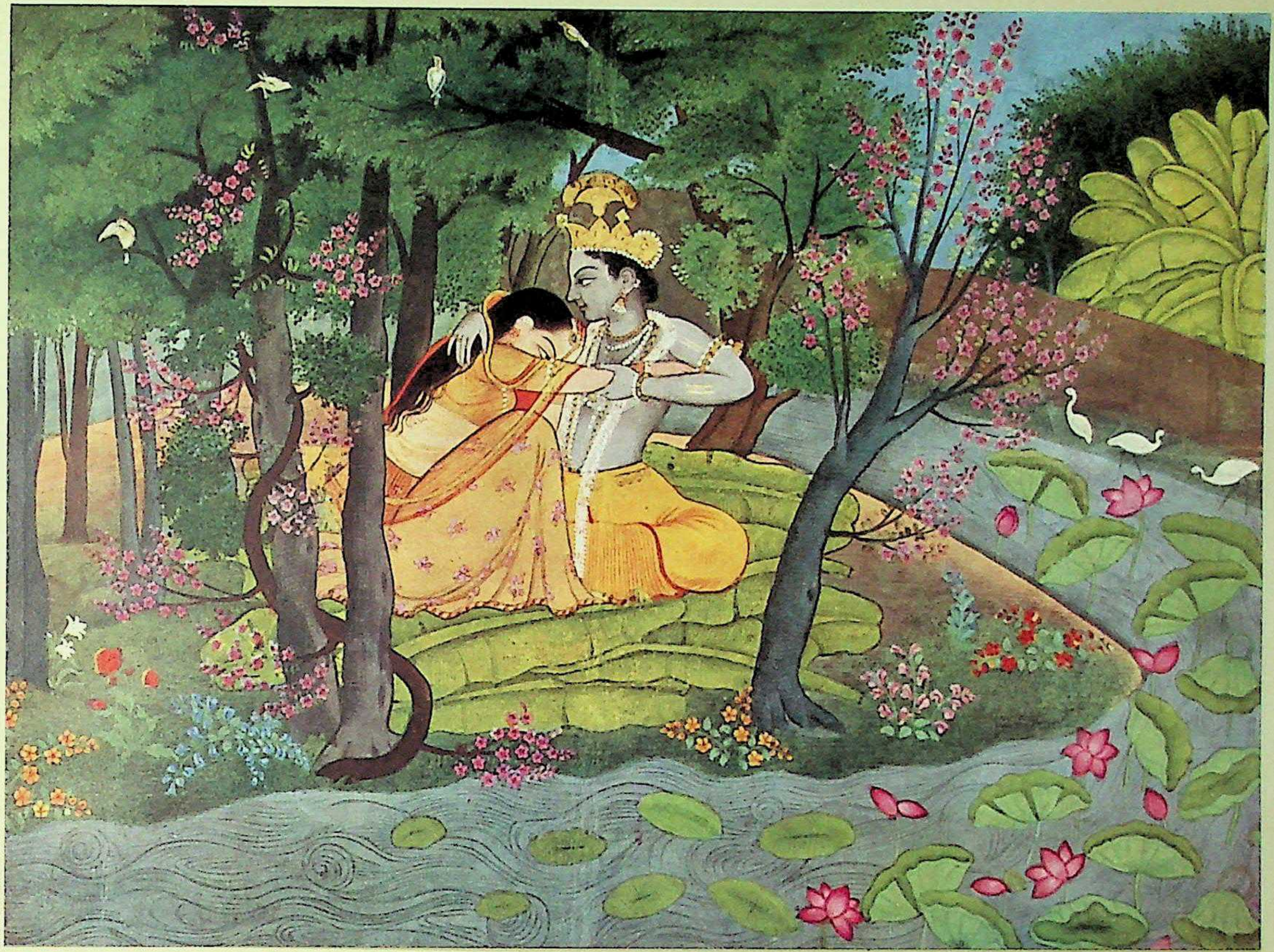

Plate 3

THE BENDING OF THE BOW

Illustration to the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. Unfinished
Kangra, *c.* 1780–85

Size: $11\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$ in

British Museum (P. C. Manuk and Miss G. M. Coles bequest, 1948–10–9–0124)

Since its translation into Hindi by the poet Tulsi Das in 1574, the *Ramayana* or Annals of Rama has never ceased to inspire Hindu India with its record of martial valour, its call to right conduct and its portrayals of wifely devotion. The present picture illustrates the dramatic event which resulted in Rama's marriage. Raja Janak, the King of Ayodhya in modern Bihar, had announced that whoever could bend 'the bow of Siva' would gain his daughter's hand. Various princes essayed the trial, only to meet with quick discomfiture. A little later, Rama was wandering in the forests with his brother, Lakshman and the sage Vishvamitra and chancing to pass the court, decided to test his fate. Seizing the bow, he not only bent but broke it. In the picture, Janak's daughter, Sita, is placing the emblem of victory, a long garland of flowers, on Rama's shoulders while Lakshman attended by Vishvamitra stands applauding at his side. To the right, Raja Janak, a bearded figure in a white turban, gazes at the feat while his courtiers await the outcome with rapt attention.

In style the picture discloses Mughal mannerisms in its detailed studies of character and its fluent naturalism. It is none the less entirely Kangra in conception, particularly in its blending of simple domesticities with aristocratic elegance, the supple grace of its feminine forms and its all-pervasive air of passionless composure. The picture is almost certainly by the same master-artist who illustrated the *Bhagavata Purana* (pl. 4), but is probably five to ten years earlier in execution.

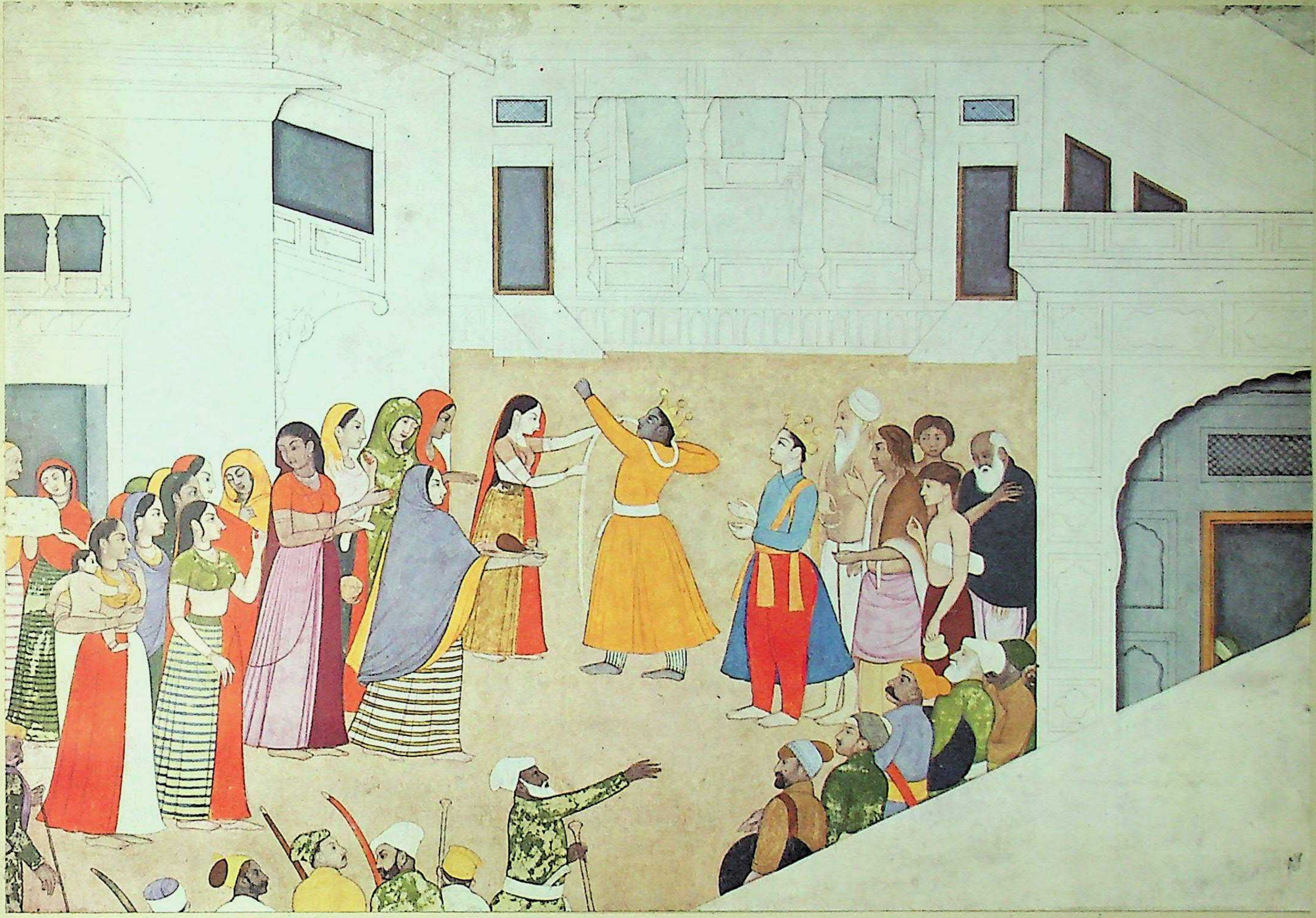

Plate 4

THE WORSHIP OF MOUNT GOVARDHAN

Illustration to the *Bhagavata Purana*

Kangra, *c.* 1790

Size: $11\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ in

J. K. Mody collection, Bombay

The present picture illustrates a daring episode in Krishna's life among the cowherds. Learning one day that they were about to do the annual worship of Indra, the Rain god, Krishna pleaded with them to abandon it and worship, instead, the hills and forests on which their livelihood directly depended. They accepted his advice and choosing Mount Govardhan as the greatest of the hills, they went with bands of musicians and spread their offerings at its foot. Krishna now commanded them to close their eyes, saying that the Mountain would manifest itself to them. When every eye was shut, Krishna himself took the form of a small figure and appeared sitting on the summit. At the same time he retained his ordinary identity as their friend and playmate. As the figure burst on their gaze, Krishna announced that the Mountain had revealed its presence and commanded the cowherds to revere it. The Mountain was accordingly worshipped, offerings were made and the cowherds went rejoicing home.

The picture is by the same artist who executed Plate 3 but represents his art at what is perhaps an even higher level of achievement.[1]

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[1] I have been greatly aided by Mr Karl Khandalavala in relating the work of these master artists to Kangra. I am also deeply indebted to him for constant advice on many problems of painting in the Punjab Hills.

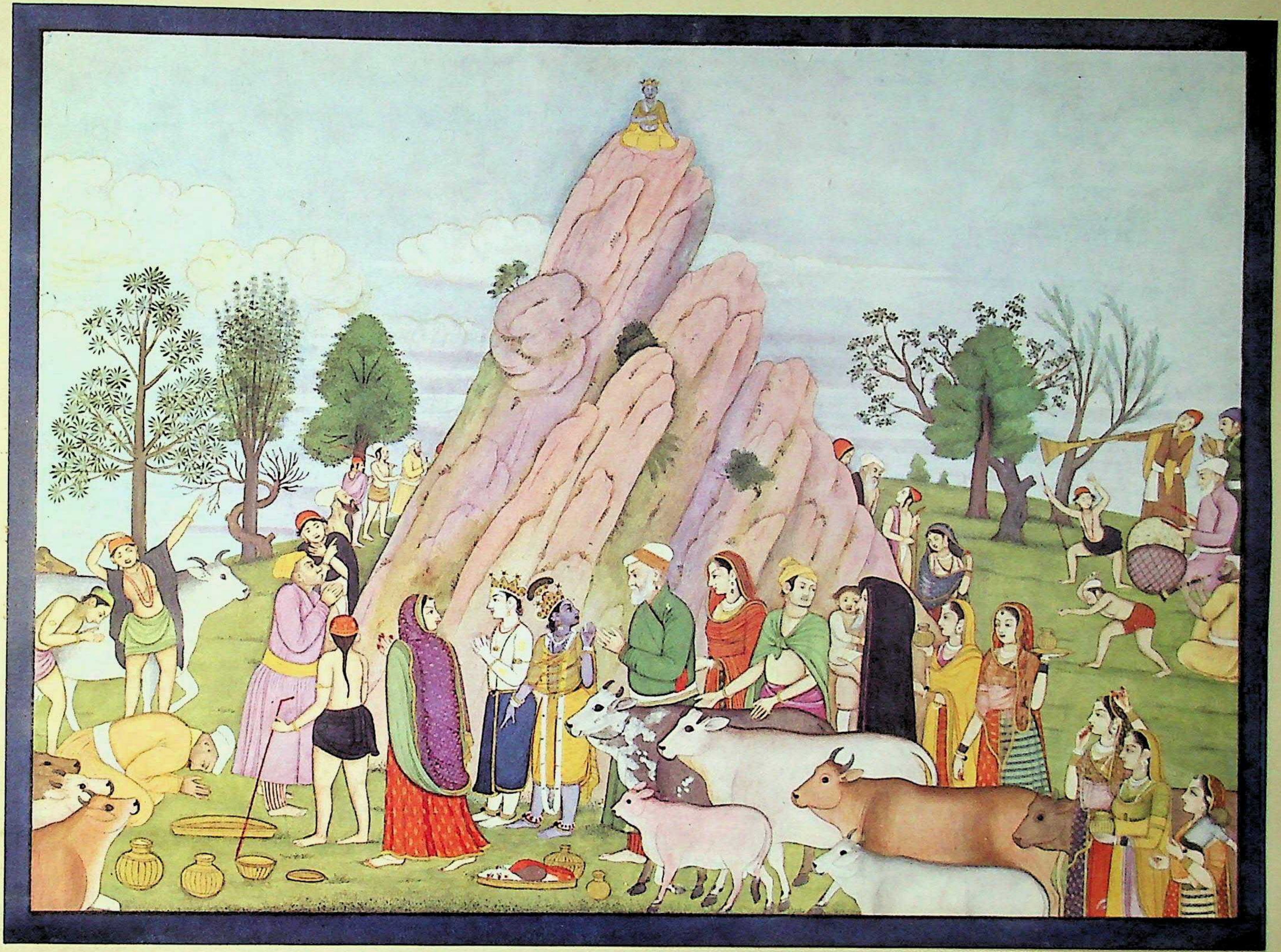

Plate 5

THE GATHERING STORM

Kangra, *c.* 1790

Size: $13\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{8}$ in

Victoria and Albert Museum (Sir William Rothenstein collection, I.S. 147–1951)

The state of mind behind this picture is what T. S. Eliot has called 'the torment of love unsatisfied'. The posture of the lady, her eyes turned blankly away while her hand strays outwards to the courtyard, suggests a state of feverish distress and this impression is reinforced by the maids fanning her brow and bringing water. It is other objects, however, which emphasize the true emotional position. The presence of twin pillows, twin lotus-flowers, twin pitchers, bottles, towers and turrets suggests the passionate union with her lover for which she longs while the choice of these particular objects hints at the true causes of her tension.

Such frankly sexual symbols were borrowed by Kangra painters from the conventions of village life and poetry, conventions which, in general, stood in marked contrast to the more rigid codes of Rajput morality. 'The symbolism of village songs' Verrier Elwin has said 'is simply the symbolism of everyday set to music. The villagers actually do think and talk in symbols all their lives. When the emissaries go on the delicate business of arranging a girl's betrothal, they do not state their purpose directly, but say they have come for merchandise, or to quench their thirst for water or seek a gourd in which to put their seed. Similarly the whole intricate absorbing business of daily love is carried on by symbols. Not only the solicitations of the seducer but the domestic arrangements of wife and husband cannot be decently conducted without a verbal stratagem.'[1]

In the present picture, it is the maid in the courtyard leaning on the long staff and the swollen clouds rolling up the sky which provide the vital keys. The staff[2] is one of the commonest sexual symbols in village India while in Indian poetry generally, vast clouds, the flash of lightning and the fall of rain are treated as conventional equivalents for the sexual act.[3] It is for this reason that clouds and rain habitually evoke 'memory and desire' and why, in the present picture, the great clouds should play their supremely important role.

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[1] Elwin and Hivale, *Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills*, p. 113.

[2] For a parallel in Western art, compare the role of the lance in Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* in the National Gallery, London.

[3] For a more detailed discussion of cloud and rain symbolism in Indian poetry, see W. G. Archer, *The Dove and the Leopard*, (London, 1950), p. 59.

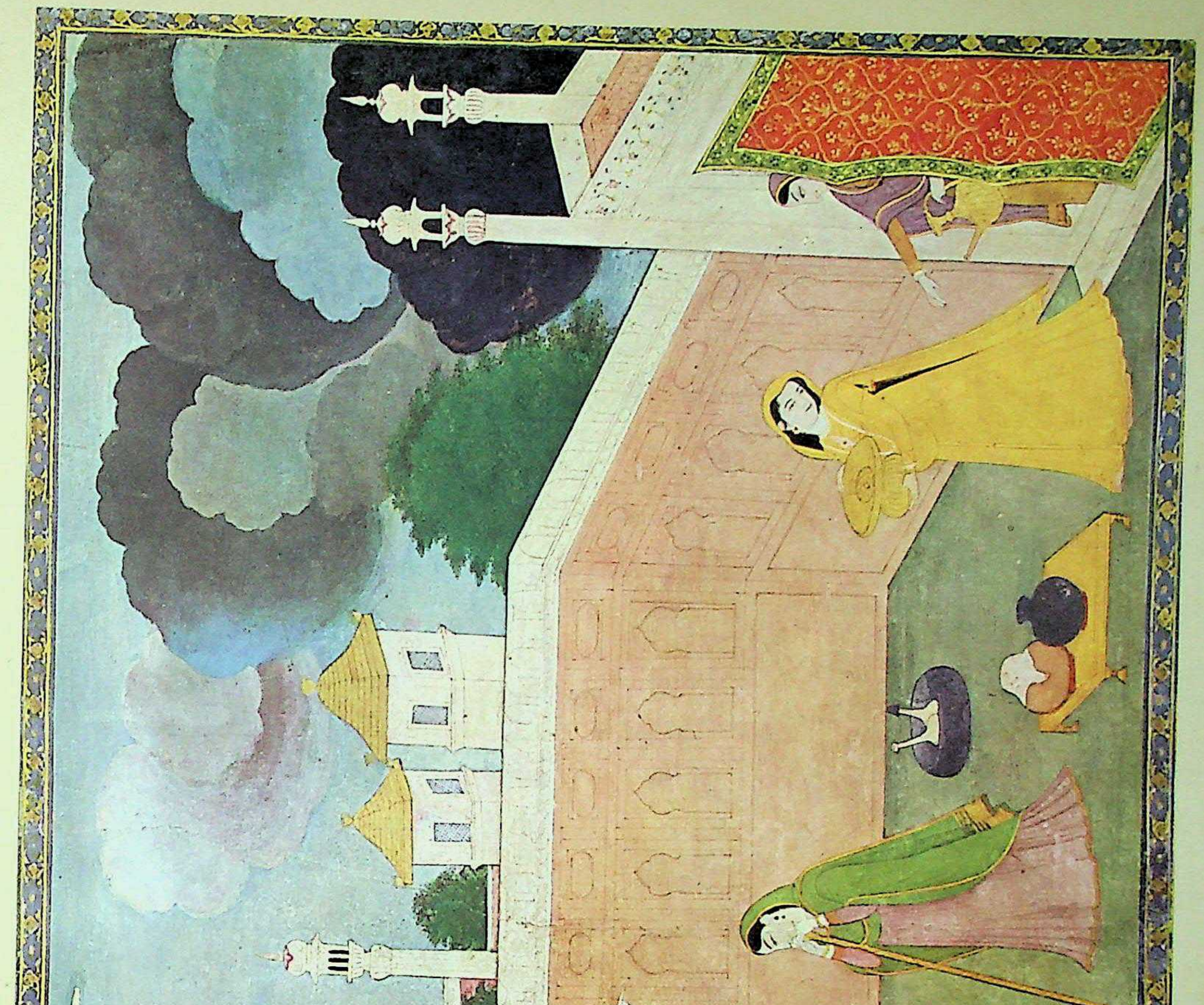

Plate 6

THE FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Kangra, *c.* 1800

Size: 10 × 6$\frac{1}{8}$ in

Victoria and Albert Museum (P. C. Manuk and Miss G. M. Coles bequest,
I.S. 9–1949)

Two ladies with their maids are celebrating in private the same Spring Festival which is illustrated on Plate 1. The figures are now somewhat shorter, the faces straighter and the air of naturalism more restrained. The subject with its sexual implications is still of some significance but it is the supple forms which surge and sway together which are clearly the picture's prime concern. Each smoothly poised figure is a kind of unit in a general dance and the fundamental identity of the forms is expressed by the sinuous curving line which fuses the bodies into a single flowing rhythm. As a consequence, there emerges from the scene an ideal type, serene, aristocratic and loving, imbued with innocent integrity but above all, exhibiting a grace of posture which dignifies even the most trivial of movements.

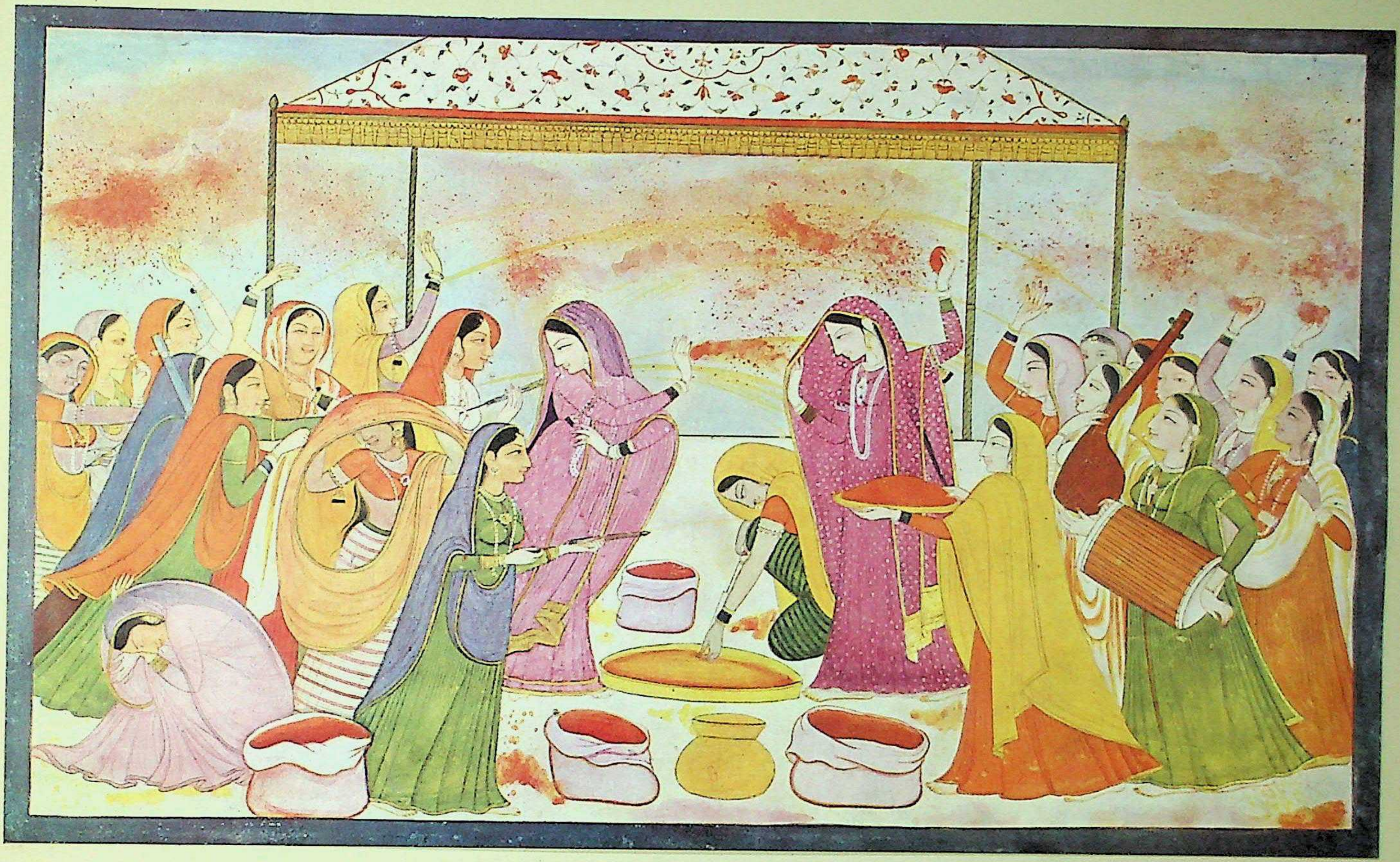

Plate 7

KRISHNA AND THE MILKMAIDS

Kangra, *c.* 1800

Size: 9⅝ × 5⅞ in

W. G. Archer collection, Oxford

Writing in 1912 of Kangra painting, Coomaraswamy admirably evoked the mood and inspiration of this picture. 'Their ethos is unique: what Chinese art achieved for landscape is here accomplished for human love. Here, if never and nowhere else in the world, the Western Gates are opened wide. The arms of lovers are about each other's necks, eye meets eye, the whispering *sakhis*[1] speak of nothing else but the course of Krishna's courtship, the very animals are spell-bound by the sound of Krishna's flute and the elements stand still to hear the *ragas* and *raginis*.[2] This art is only concerned with the realities of life; above all, with passionate love-service, conceived as the means and symbol of all Union. If Rajput art at first sight appears to lack the material charm of Persian pastorals, or the historic significance of Mughal portraiture, it more than compensates in tenderness and depth of feeling, in gravity and reverence. Rajput art creates a magic world where all men are heroic, all women are beautiful, passionate and shy, beasts both wild and tame are the friends of man and trees and flowers are conscious of the footsteps of the Bridegroom as he passes by. This magic world is not unreal or fanciful but a world of imagination and eternity, visible to all who do not refuse to see with the transfiguring eyes of love.'[3]

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[1] Companions or friends of Radha, Krishna's principal love.

[2] Conventional modes of Indian musical expression.

[3] Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*, Vol. I, p. 7.

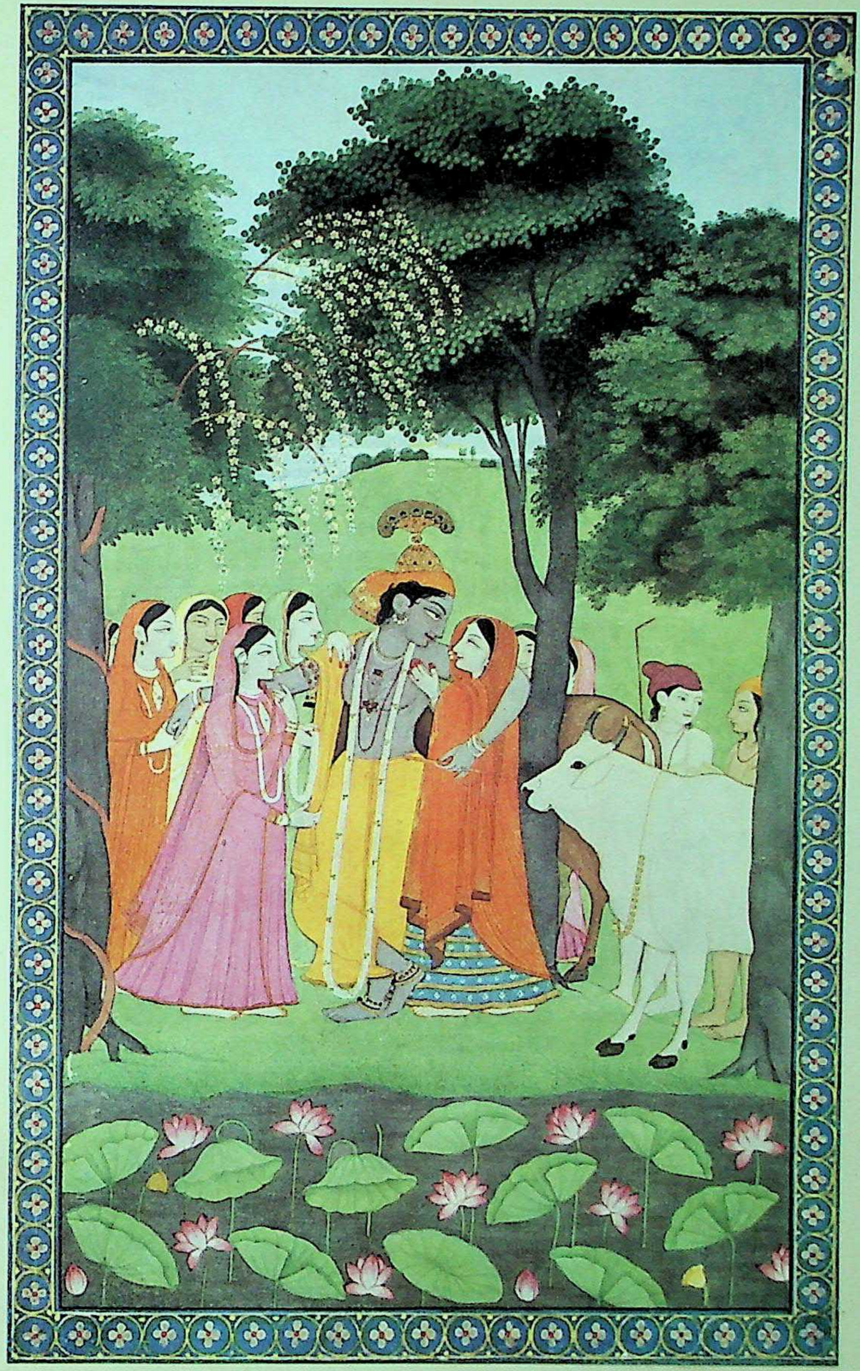

Plate 8

THE LADY AND THE MIRROR

Kangra, *c.* 1805

Size: 8 × 5¼ in

Victoria and Albert Museum (purchased from Dr A. K. Coomaraswamy, 1912,
I.M. 7–1912)

The conceptions of ideal loveliness in women, implied by this picture, have been well expressed by an Indian art-critic of distinction, Dr Vasudeva Saran Agrawala. 'The focal point of the Kangra school', he says, 'consists in the flaming beauty of woman. The life of an Indian woman as lived in the idyllic land of love and expressed through the twelve months, the six seasons and the twenty-four hours of the day provides the rich texture of Pahari paintings. Passionate love enriched by devotional feeling inherent in the heart of a woman towards the man she loves imparts colour to the charming brocade of the painter's art. Woman in these paintings alone is real. The man lives and shines under her light as a moth captivated by the warmth of the flame. We do not gather any lasting impression of male beauty in Kangra paintings. But the beauty of a woman's body, the delicacy of her form, the radiance of her face and the indescribable loveliness of her life are subjects in which the Kangra painters excel.'

Dr Agrawala's remarks on the interdependence of art and poetry and their common preoccupation with romance are also worth quoting. 'According to both the painters and the poets, love is the summum bonum of life, the real substance which makes life worth living. Love is conceived of as the only adorable ideal. Love alone imparts variety to life. The real beauty of living begins with the dawning of love. As vernal beauty descends on the forest and transforms it with the magic of foliage and flowers, similarly love transforms the life of a woman first stepping into youth and passing through its rich passionate experiences. Love as the basis of life's fullness is not a mere erotic satisfaction, although it is rooted in sensuous beauty and depends for its fruition on all the external paraphernalia of passionate love-making. Love is the supreme virtue of woman's heart, kindred in essence with the *bhakti* or devotion taught by the religious reformers. It is against this background that the lovers in the Kangra paintings are real, not as individuals but as types of Man and Woman, who in devotional terminology are known as Radha and Krishna.'[1]

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[1] Vasudeva Saran Agrawala, 'The Romance of Himachal Paintings', *Roopa–Lekha* Vol. XX, 2, 1948–9), pp. 87–93.

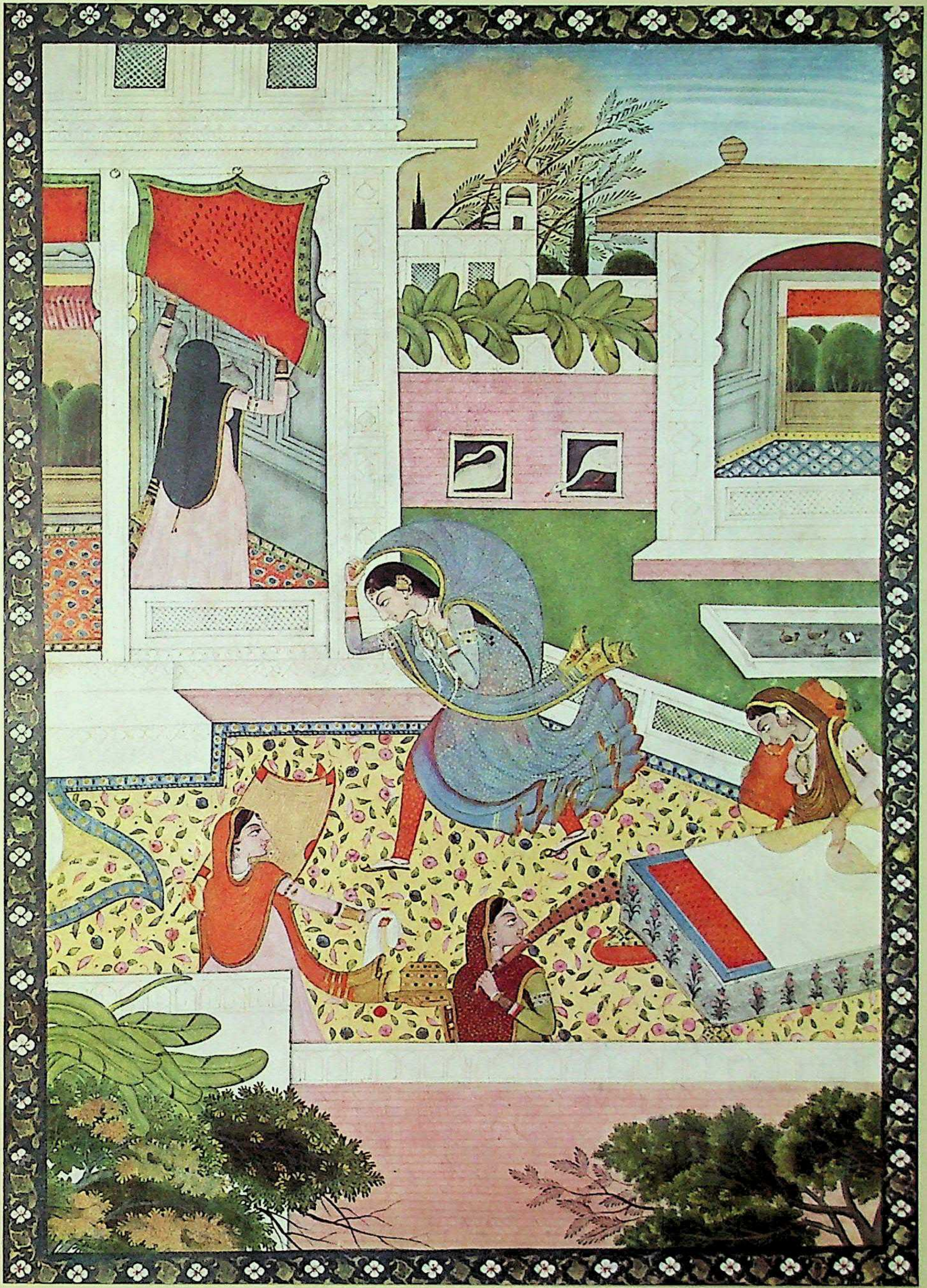


Plate 10

THE KITE

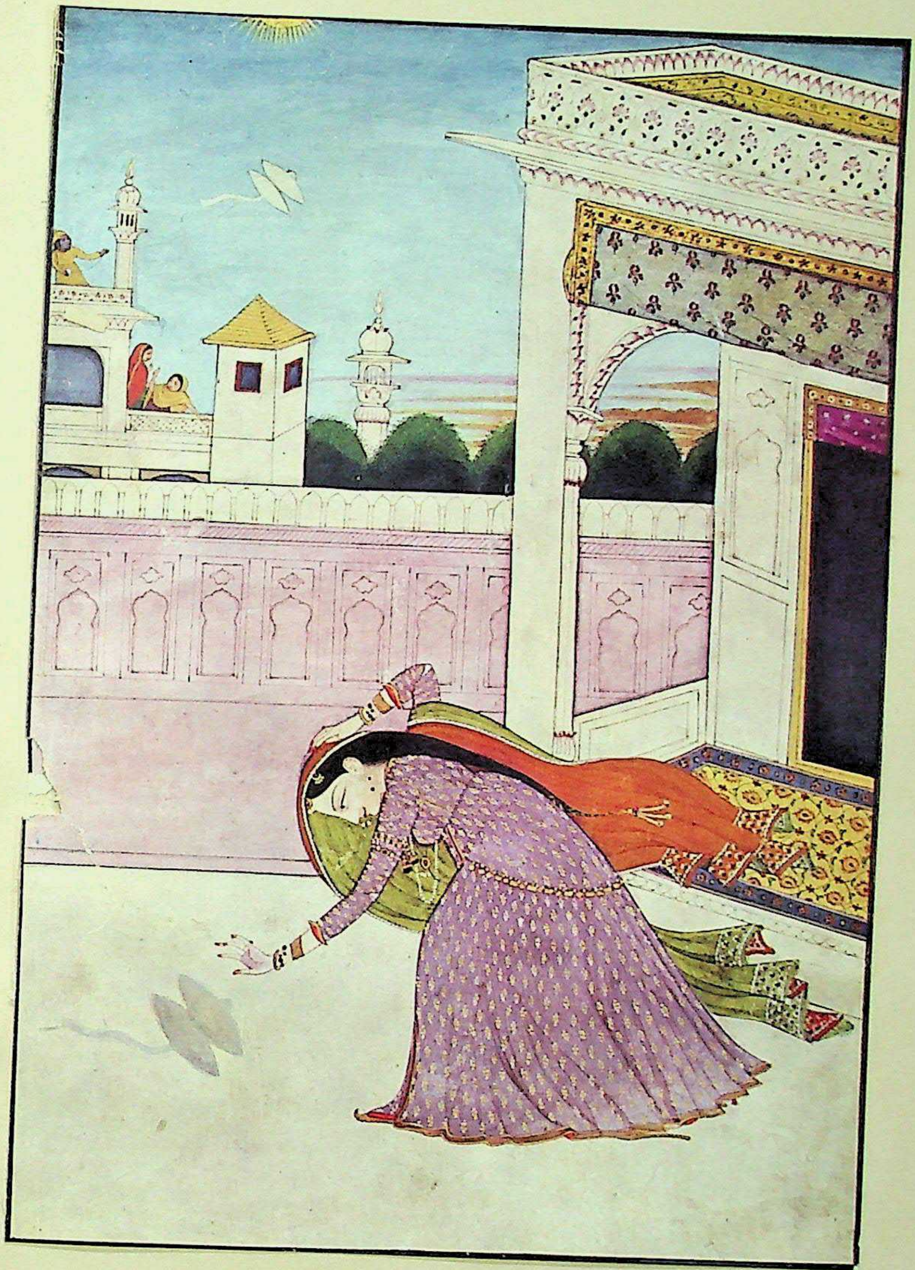
Kangra, *c.* 1820

Size: $8\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{3}{4}$ in

British Museum (P. C. Manuk and Miss G. M. Coles bequest, 1948–10–9–0120)

In India, kite-flying is part of the Sun festival which occurs in early winter—its aim being to bless the husband and obtain the boon of children for his wife. In medieval times, lovers sometimes transmitted messages by attaching them to kites and causing the latter to drop in the beloved's courtyard or near her feet. Even today, Indian youths occasionally cause their kites to fall where a girl is living in order to attract her notice. Kite battles are also arranged—the string being treated with gum and powdered glass in order to give it a razor-like cutting edge. Victory in these combats is a tribute to the flyer's power of manoeuvre and provides the same intense elation as success in other sports.

In the picture, Krishna, a small figure on a distant terrace, is flying a kite while Radha is stooping to grasp its shadow. Its chance appearance is evidently intended to remind her of Krishna's presence and perhaps to suggest the awakening of their love.



continued from page 5]

as Rai Krishna Das and Karl Khandalavala have suggested, that these were originally a part of the wedding dowry. But besides pictures, it is possible that a number of Kangra artists also accompanied Anirodh into exile—a suggestion which is supported by the style of painting associated with the period 1830 to 1860 in Garhwal itself. Indeed Mr N. C. Mehta has gone so far as to suggest that many late 'Kangra' pictures are in fact of Garhwal origin.[1] Yet if certain artists emigrated to Garhwal, at least a nucleus must have stayed behind. It is difficult to believe, however, that sensitive patronage was now forthcoming. An uneasy period, first under the Sikhs and then under Raja Jodhbir Chand, had followed Anirodh's retreat until, in 1846, the territory was ceded to the British. While painting seems to have persisted until almost the present day—four artists were still at work in 1929 when Mr J. C. French visited Kangra—the style shows every symptom of rapid decay. The early lithe grace deteriorates into a weak prettiness and this in turn is succeeded by a shrinkage in the height of the figures and by harsh severities of tone. Indeed a series of paintings, dated 1858, in the British Museum is marked by blatant colouring and an almost iron-like stiffness.

Of greater significance as a social symptom is the phase of Kangra painting connected with the Sikhs. As was natural in a people with no traditional art of their own, the Sikhs had avidly adopted whatever art-forms were current in the areas they ravaged. They were thus, unconsciously, the 'art-carriers' of the Punjab Hills. From about 1810 onwards, certain Kangra painters seem to have adjusted their subjects to Sikh requirements and thus a second provincial Kangra school was established, its chief centres being Lahore and Amritsar. Most of its products, however, have a garish brightness which makes them a travesty of Kangra painting proper.

These offshoots of the style by no means exhaust its ramifications for so compelling was the appeal of the Kangra feminine type that its general manner spread far and wide. In Chamba, a parallel school had developed under Guler influence in about the year 1785 and this continued throughout the nineteenth century. In Guler itself, it is likely that the local tradition gradually coalesced with that of Kangra while in Punch, yet another provincial Kangra school developed after 1813, the year when the Sikhs wrested the State from its Muslim ruler. The success with which the later Kangra style 'annexed' or subjugated painting in the Punjab Hills, is, in fact, the most convincing proof of its artistic vitality. Outside Tehri Garhwal, the achievements of these later artists were inconsiderable but during the great formative years from 1780 to 1806, the school had produced some of the most poetic and romantic pictures ever painted in India. It is these which make of Kangra painting one of the greatest schools of Indian art.

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[1] Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

Plate 1

THE FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Kangra, *c.* 1780

Size: $10\frac{5}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ in

Victoria and Albert Museum (P. C. Manuk and Miss G. M. Coles bequest, I.S. 8–1949)

Radha and Krishna are celebrating the Holi Festival, termed by O. C. Gangoly 'the Indian Saturnalia of Spring'. The ritual is performed in the early part of the hot weather when the rising heat and flowering trees induce a general mood of romantic exhilaration. During the day, men and boys take bamboo syringes, squirting all-comers with red or saffron-coloured water and flinging over them handfuls of red or yellow powder. At night, huge bonfires are lit.

The picture which shows Radha and her friends calmly accepting the onslaughts of Krishna testifies yet again to the power of Kangra painting to imbue what are basically sexual situations with tenderness and nobility. A Hindi poem, quoted by Gangoly, describes how 'The syringes in their happy flow augment the passion of love like continued showers in the season of rain'[1] and indeed the whole ritual could be described as a ballet on the act of love—the bowls and drums sustaining the feminine role and the bamboo instruments the male. So natural, however, is the whole setting and so innocently inserted are the particular symbols that 'it is not difficult to overlook to what extent these poems and pictures are frankly amorous'.[2]

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[1] O. C. Gangoly, *Masterpieces of Rajput Painting* (Calcutta, 1926), text to plate 47.

[2] Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*, Vol. I, 42.

First published in mcmlii by Faber and Faber Limited, 24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1.
Text pages printed by Mardon, Son and Hall, Ltd., Bristol. Colour blocks made and printed by Fine Art Engravers, Esher.
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